

## Identification Is 'The Essence of Our Common Bond'

" 'My name is Rosemary P., and I am an alcoholic.' That's a simple introduction. And powerful. It tells you who and what I am, instantly. It immediately connects me to you if you, too, are an alcoholic."

Speaking at the June 1989 Northeast Regional Forum in Portland, Maine, Rosemary called identification "the very essence of our common bond" and expressed concern that "the way we traditionally introduce ourselves at meetings has changed so much, the word 'alcoholic' often is omitted entirely."

The delegate (Panel 39) for Central New York pointed to a new crop of introductions heard around A.A.—from "I'm cross-addicted" and "I'm chemically dependent" to "I'm a recovering person." She said that she is "always tempted to respond, 'You're a cross-addicted what?' 'You're a chemically dependent what?' And 'Whom or what are you recovering from?'" Her frustration mounts, she added, "because I need to know that you're at the meeting for the same reason that I'm there—for ongoing recovery from the disease of alcoholism."

Rosemary further believes that the breakdown in the way we identify ourselves "puts a serious strain on our unity and singleness of purpose. When I say at an A.A. function that 'I'm a drug addict and an alcoholic' or 'I'm a cross-addicted alcoholic,' I am telling you that I'm a special kind of alky—my case of alcoholism is different from yours! I add an extra dimension to my disease—one that, because of our singleness of purpose, should not be addressed at an A.A. meeting. I have just cut our common bond in half and, more importantly, have diluted my own purpose for being there."

In her area, Rosemary noted, "it was thought that after a person was around A.A. for a while, all the other descriptive words would fall away and we would hear, 'I am an alcoholic.' But this has not happened. We see people sober in A.A. for two, three, four years and

more—still clinging to the treatment jargon they were first taught. They have not made the transition."

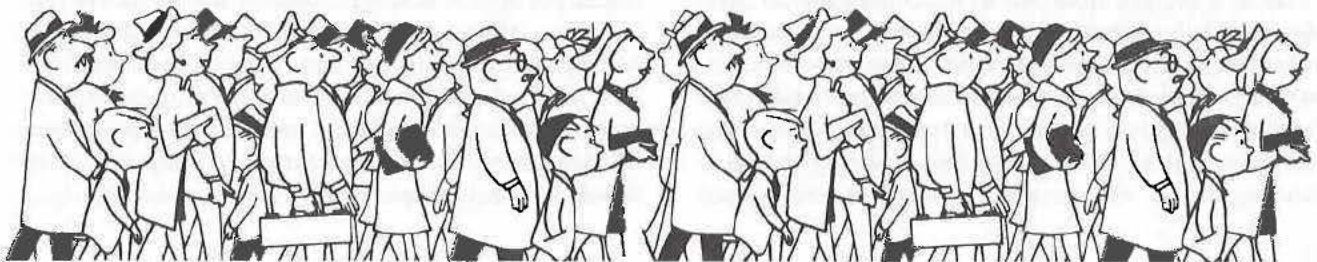
What we need to do, Rosemary suggests, is to separate our issues and take them separately to the programs designed to address them: Narcotics Anonymous for drug addiction; Overeaters Anonymous for addiction to food, and so on. When participating in these various meetings, she feels, "we should identify ourselves accordingly."

It has been suggested, she said, "that we approach treatment facilities and, in the spirit of cooperation and concern for the newcomer, ask that they instruct their patients on how to separate their addictions rather than group them together under the label of 'addictive personalities'—using the catchall phrase we hear so often, that 'a drug is a drug is a drug.'"

The idea of seeking outside cooperation is all very well, Rosemary observed, "but I wonder if the real answer doesn't lie squarely within our own Fellowship. Isn't it the responsibility of each of us to keep our program intact, to pass it on to the newcomer as it was given to us? Importantly, can we do this with patient explanation, tolerance toward differences—and more patient explanation? I believe we can, through committed sponsorship, strong home groups and active service. That way, our new members will learn how to be a part of A.A., not a fragment of it."

Most of us, Rosemary concluded, "have heard it said that if A.A. is ever destroyed, it will be destroyed from within. In my opinion, apathy, cloaked often in the guise of 'live and let live,' is one of our greatest enemies. But the destructive force is not those members who introduce themselves as 'cross-addicted alcoholics'—it is the attitude of those members who sit back and say, 'So what!'"

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"Twelve Traditions Illustrated"



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## A.A.s Roll Up Their Sleeves at Intergroup Seminar

"Heaven has surely reserved a special place for every one of them," A.A. co-founder Bill W. said back in 1946 of the few, fledgling intergroups and the work they were doing to help both suffering and recovering alcoholics (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 30). One way that today's strong network of U.S./Canada intergroups and central offices maintain their effectiveness is by sharing problems, solutions and ideas with each another. Which is just what managers and other service workers did at the Eleventh Annual Intergroup/Central Office Seminar held in Bloomington, Minnesota, November 8-10.

Hosted by the Twin Cities—Minneapolis and St. Paul—the weekend of workshops, panel discussions and fellowship brought together approximately 132 managers, delegates and intergroup liaisons. Together with a handful of A.A. World Service trustees and members of the General Service Office and Grapevine staffs, they tackled challenges related to distributing A.A. literature; disseminating public information; handling Twelfth Step calls; attracting A.A. volunteers, and much more.

"The seminar encouraged a sense of community that was rejuvenating for many of us," says seminar co-host Dave J., manager of the St. Paul Central Office. "We had good and often spirited discussions, and it was particularly good to share with members of the General Service Board and G.S.O., among them Carl B. [Class B (alcoholic) West Central regional trustee] and Ames S. [executive editor of the A.A. Grapevine]."

Dave's fellow host Rick W., manager of the Minneapolis Intergroup, feels the same. "It was exciting to be able to talk shop," he added, "and to tune in on several great ideas, from a way to involve more bilingual A.A.s in intergroup service to a suggested format for weekly volunteer training sessions." Noting that the planning for the seminar was fun but more work than

he'd ever imagined, Rick says with a grin that Susan K., manager of the Baltimore Intergroup, which hosted the 1993 seminar, "was on target when she observed that 'once you've had the responsibility for putting on a seminar, you never complain or find fault with one again.'"

Donna S., manager of the Central Ohio Fellowship Intergroup in Columbus, chaired a workshop on Special Needs at the seminar. "It was pointed out," she reports, "that people putting together meeting directories need to be very cautious about designating meetings as 'wheelchair accessible.' They should first ascertain that not only the meeting room but restroom facilities as well are accessible."

Donna says her intergroup looks forward to hosting the Twelfth Intergroup/Central Office Seminar, to be held October 23-26, 1997. For information, contact Donna S., Central Ohio Fellowship Intergroup, 1561 Leonard Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43219-2580; or phone (614) 253-8501.

To obtain a report of the Seminar, write: Intergroup Association of Minneapolis Suburban Area, 6300 Walker Street, #215, St. Louis Park, MN 55102-1032; or call (612) 922-0880. A \$5 contribution is requested to cover production and mailing costs.

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## Paying Our Way With Something Other than Money

Some weeks ago a concerned A.A. in the southwest phoned the General Service Office. She related that her group met in a room provided by a local hospital that refused, absolutely, to take any form of rent. Uncomfortable with the status quo, the group nonetheless had been living with it. Then, the caller said, opportunity came calling: The hospital launched a fund raising drive, and one method they used to raise money was to sell the bricks from their old building, which had been torn down. Each person or organization that participated in the drive, at \$120 per brick, would be listed on a publicly displayed board.

The A.A. group welcomed the chance to buy a brick, thinking of it as a symbolic way to partially fulfill their rental obligation and at the same time say thank you to the hospital. Most of the members felt, however, that being listed publicly as Alcoholics Anonymous would constitute a violation of the Anonymity Tradition. They took a group conscience and concluded that since the members had purchased a brick purely in the interest of self-support, they should be identified publicly as "Anonymous."



A.A. co-founder Bill W. used to say that there's "a place where money and spirituality mix . . . in the hat." But that hat can come in many shapes, forms and hues, as the experiences of this group and others show. A sampling:

One California group met for a time in a church that would not accept rental income. So the membership, explaining A.A.'s Seventh Tradition of self-support to the church, volunteered their services once a month to clean the meeting hall in which the group met. The arrangement worked well, a member reports, and one year the A.A.s even painted the meeting room.

A Washington, D.C. group meets in a room of the U.S. Senate, which cannot accept rent. So getting creative, the members donate things like elbow grease—keeping the premises spanking clean and neat—and a new coffee urn. Some groups finding themselves in a similar situation have donated chairs, tables, paper supplies and carpeting; some have kept the grass mowed and paid for janitorial services, and others have used the "rent money" to provide literature for the facility or for a local hospital or correctional center.

All these rent substitutes are in accord with the A.A. Guidelines on Finance, which suggest to groups that if the facility in which an A.A. group meets cannot accept rent (such as a federal or state building), then the group "can usually contribute in some other way," such as purchasing equipment or furnishings for the facility.

In determining how to handle such matters, the home group can borrow from the experience of others in the Fellowship. But when the chips are down, it is responsible to no authority other than its own collective conscience. And, in the spirit of Tradition Four, each group is autonomous "except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole."

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## Traditions Come to Life for Massachusetts A.A.s

"It can't be done!" . . . "Nobody will come!" . . . "The doors will close!" These, relates Eastern Massachusetts A.A. member Annemarie M., "were just a few of the discouraging words voiced by doubters and cynics about our newly formed Living Our Traditions Group. That was back in 1989; this May, to the amazement of many, the group will celebrate its eighth anniversary."

Committed to the study of A.A.'s Traditions and Concepts, the group has seen membership numbers fluctuate over the years, as is the case with most groups. "A core of about 12 members, with spans of sobriety ranging from just months to many years, gathers

around the table every Friday evening," relates Annemarie, "and laughter and enthusiasm are part and parcel of our discussions."

In the course of their studies, the members follow a written outline that has been adapted and honed over the years, all the while "staying open and flexible," according to Annemarie. "Certain basic readings are repeated often throughout the year," she says, "from literature such as *A.A. Comes of Age* and numerous Grapevine articles. Invariably we wrap each discussion around the Twelve Traditions Checklist [available from the Grapevine], which always puts the focus on personal application of the A.A. principles." Following are some other ways in which the creative use of literature brings the Traditions to life as described by Annemarie:

— "To expand discussion of Tradition Three, we read the pamphlet 'Problems Other Than Alcohol'; the Big Book chapter titled 'The Doctor's Opinion' and Appendices II and III in the Big Book; and several Grapevine articles about identification, such as 'What's in a Name?'"

— "There are endless resources to enhance Tradition Five: Chapter Seven in the Big Book, and the pamphlets 'A Member's-Eye View of Alcoholics Anonymous' and 'This Is A.A.' among them. We usually spend seven to eight weeks reading and discussing the text of the pamphlet 'Questions and Answers on Sponsorship.' Our premise: It's through sponsorship that newcomers generally learn about A.A.'s primary purpose.

— "One of the best examples we've found for Concept III, the Right of Decision, is the group's coffee maker or person in charge of refreshments. And sometimes we'll read the pamphlet 'The G.S.R. May Be the Most Important Job in A.A.' In fact, a few years ago, while doing just that, we realized some of the text was outdated and brought this to the attention of our district meeting. The information was passed on to our area assembly, then to the Literature Committee of the General Service Conference. It took some time, but the Conference accepted the committee-approved revisions, which are reflected in the present pamphlet.

— "Each year we review the most recent *Final Conference Report*. This helps to make current some of the points in Concepts VII, VIII and XI, not to mention Traditions One through Five."

About once a month, Annemarie reports, "we are invited to put on a Primary Purpose/Traditions meeting for some other group, something that is most rewarding to us. We feel that each of us is responsible for becoming better informed about A.A. as a whole. We sincerely believe we need to heed the collective experience of those who came before us—experience that forms the bedrock of our principles—and that as individuals and as groups we must conform to these principles so that A.A. will be here for those still to come."

## International Convention Information

### Name That Theme for 2000!

*Deadline 6/30/97*

Believe it or not, it's time to start thinking about a theme title for the 2000 International Convention celebration of A.A.'s 65th Anniversary in Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 29-July 2, 2000. We invite you to send in suggestions for a theme. The trustees' International Conventions Committee will select the theme at their August 1997 meeting, so please let us hear from you by June 30, 1997.

To spark your thinking, the themes of past A.A. International Conventions have been: 1965 "I Am Responsible"; 1970 "Unity"; 1975 "Let It Begin With Me"; 1980 "The Joy of Living"; 1985 "Fifty Years With Gratitude"; 1990 "Fifty-Five Years—One Day At A Time" and 1995 "A.A. Everywhere—Anywhere."

Send your ideas to: International Conventions Committee, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

### Registration and Housing for 2000

Many A.A. members are beginning to write G.S.O. requesting information on registration and housing accommodations for A.A.'s 65th Birthday celebration. Please do not write or call G.S.O., as this information will not be available for some time.

Registration/housing forms will be sent to all A.A. groups on our mailing list in September 1999. At the same time, local intergroups and central offices will also receive approximately 100 copies of these forms. Most of the hotels in and around Minneapolis, Minnesota are already committed to our Convention and the rates for each—from very reasonable to luxurious—will be described on the registration/housing forms.

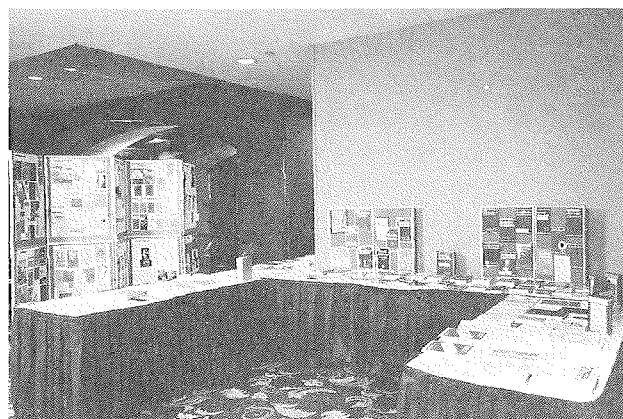
The procedures for registration and housing, beyond specifying this 1999 mailing date, are still in the planning stages. Notification of these procedures will appear in *Box 4-5-9* several times prior to September 1999. We will use *Box 4-5-9* to keep in constant communication with groups so that anyone who is interested will have timely and accurate information. As we do not maintain a separate mailing list of A.A. members who have requested information, please be sure your home group receives *Box 4-5-9* so that you and all members of your group will have access to this information as we get nearer to Convention time.

## Delegates Forge Ever Closer Bonds at World Service Meeting

"As we gather from around the world, we cannot deny our diversity and differences. Nor should we—for it is in our diversity that we find our strength." Thus did Jim Estelle, (nonalcoholic) chairman of the U.S./Canada General Service Board, open the 14th biennial World Service Meeting (WSM), held in New York City, October 27-31.

One of the most exciting results of ties forged at past meetings has been a steady increase in the number of countries "sponsoring" countries where A.A. is new or struggling, or effectively providing assistance through visits or the sale of literature.

Some of the WSM delegates—42 in all from 26 countries or zones (e.g., Central America, Southern zone, accounts for three countries)—arrived early, in time to attend the annual Bill W. dinner-dance sponsored by New York Intergroup. A number of delegates stayed on in New York after the proceedings to attend the fall board weekend, as guests of the U.S./Canada General Service Board.



*WSM delegates brought literature from their countries—an impressive display of the A.A. message in many languages.*

The productive five-day WSM was filled with presentations and workshops in which the participants shared problems and solutions, renewed old friendships and initiated new ones. Jim Estelle pointed out that individual country reports reflected "at least one common observation: that group contributions do not support service functions without revenues from literature sales. I encourage you to be constant in reminding others that the Seventh Tradition is not the seventh in priority. Further, while spiritual freedom usually accompanies sobriety, spirituality demands discipline of a nature that allows others to receive our lifesaving message. And that discipline is where spirituality and money meet."



In a drawing that over the years has become traditional, Jorge R. of Mexico won the coveted banner engraved with this year's theme, "Love and Gratitude in Action." He noted at a workshop that while A.A. in Mexico continues to expand rapidly—numbering more than 11,000 regular and institutional groups to date—"only 5% of the members are women and, consequently, almost none of them are yet active in service."

At least four countries told of celebrating their 50th A.A. anniversaries in 1996—Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and South Africa. Brazil will hold its 50th jubilee March 28–29 in Rio de Janeiro, and Great Britain will do the same in Blackpool, June 13–15; Norway celebrates 50 years in May. Following are highlights of presentations and reports from some of the countries represented at the WSM:

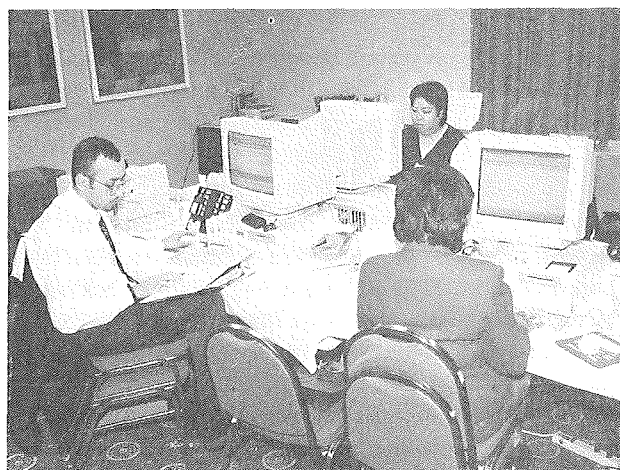
*Australia*—The first country outside the U.S./Canada to receive the A.A. message, in 1942, Australia now has a membership of 15,000 to 18,000. In recent years, more and more women and young people have been attending meetings, many of them eager to participate in service work.

*Finland*—Now 40 years old, A.A. in Finland has about 668 groups and 15,000 sober alcoholics. Speaking on carrying the message in a changing world, Hannu S. said, "The way the message was carried 20 or 30 years ago is not necessarily the way it should be carried today. Then, the caller tended to be about 50 years old, and the story told was a long one with wild episodes of prison experience. Today's newcomers are apt to be 20 to 30 years old, and are often women with alcohol and drug problems, though seldom with prison experience. When such a person calls the A.A. hotline, it might be helpful for someone of the same age, sex and approximate experience to do the communicating."

*Japan*—A.A. celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1995. In the early days, Naoto O. observed, "our meeting list could be printed on a postcard. Today it is more than 30 pages long, and meetings are held all over the country."

*Poland*—Women represent 4% to 8% of A.A. members in Poland, which has more than 1,000 groups. Most often, groups meet in parish houses, clinics and "abstinence" clubhouses.

*The Netherlands*—"Founded in 1948, A.A. from the beginning withdrew into isolation, mainly because of the highly developed social welfare system and the fact that our groups focused on a simplified version of the Twelve Steps, which led to the development of a special Dutch–A.A. culture, with its own understanding of how meetings should be held and conducted. Growth for years was almost at a standstill, but since 1992, thanks largely to greater cooperation with professional treatment organizations, A.A. is experiencing a slow but steady growth."



Frank Segui, Yee Eng and Ivy Rivera, G.S.O. staff assistants (all nonalcoholics) working behind the scenes.

*Russian Federation*—"The Fellowship has been developing here since 1987 and is now approaching its 10th anniversary. There are 147 registered A.A. groups in 74 cities and localities, with an overall membership topping 3,000. Our financial circumstances are severely limited because of various factors: the national period of transition; difficulties deriving from the size of our country and related problems of communication; and the simple fact of our relative youth. Currently, group contributions do not cover General Service Office and board expenses. Publication of A.A. literature is accomplished mainly with the help of income from the sale of books and pamphlets we have received from the U.S./Canada."

*U.S./Canada*—"Living our Tradition of Anonymity at the level of the media," said Larry N., trustee-at-large/U.S., "gives public evidence of our need for humility as individuals, and shows clearly that it is the message, not the messenger, that is important to A.A.!"

Reporting on the work of the International Literature Fund, established in 1990, George D., manager of G.S.O. New York, told the assemblage that in its six short years, the Fund has received "more than \$78,570 contributed by A.A. general service boards, groups and individual members for the specific purpose of providing start-up literature for those countries unable to finance their own translations."

Among several letters of thanks that George read to the WSM delegates was this message from a Hungarian member, written in behalf of the Budapest Intergroup, "The [literature] is a great help to us, and I can only react with awe that I am reading the word of the man whom I can thank for my life. On behalf of A.A. in Hungary, I express our thanks with a grateful heart."

The 15th World Service Meeting will be held October 4–8, 1998, in Auckland, New Zealand. Its theme: "Service Basic to Personal Recovery and A.A. Unity."

## Let's Stop Wearing Out Our Welcome!

"Where will we meet when no place will have us? Will we wait until it's too late or are we going to learn from the experience of the past and mend our fences now?" member John P. wants to know. Writing in the November 1996 issue of the monthly *Intergroup Newsletter* of the Intergroup Central Office of Santa Clara County, California, he notes that "scores of groups have lost their meeting places in recent years because of the destructive behavior of some members, and many more have been cautioned."

This is a problem that affects us all, John points out. "A.A. members are not the only ones who share experience. Church people talk to each other too. And it's not only churches—other facilities are increasingly wary of A.A. They see their maintenance and janitorial costs rising to repair the damage some of us do to their premises, and they worry about the liability claims our actions may expose them to."

Incident by incident, John warns, "we are destroying the goodwill built up by generations of A.A.s who did not act as if they owned the place but knew they were other people's guests—since the nominal rent we usually pay (and sometimes fail to pay) hardly qualifies us as tenants." It is true that the troublesome behaviors—cigarette burns, random messiness, noise pollution and even occasional vandalism and thievery, to name some—"are confined to a relative handful of A.A.s," he adds, "but we have always had a few angry, destructive people coming to our meeting because alcoholism tends to make some people antisocial. Co-founder Bill W. said that we had nothing to fear from them and that in fact, '... thousands of these sometimes frightening people were to make astonishing recoveries and become our greatest workers and intimate friends.' [*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 140]. So what's different now?"

What's different, John suggests, is that "Bill lived in a Fellowship of strong A.A. groups. Members explicitly joined and took pride in their groups; and they acknowledged that they had responsibility, individually and collectively, to keep those groups healthy and focused on our primary purpose: to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. They welcomed even the craziest alcoholics, but they did not ignore the craziness or pretend it was something else. They knew that, left unchecked, such behavior vitiates unity and destroys groups. To deal with it, they had a powerful tool called the group conscience that can actually put an end to harmful behavior at an A.A. meeting. It does so by strengthening unity and allow-

ing the membership to speak with one voice. No one alcoholic in A.A. has authority over any other alcoholic, so admonishing your fellow drunk to shape up carries little or no weight. But a group of alcoholics, speaking out of the group conscience, does have authority and, strange as it seems, even very upset members recognize it. Sometimes they merely leave when the group addresses them, but often they change. Either way, the group has put the common welfare first.

"Importantly, when something does go wrong, a group won't just wash their hands of the whole thing and go elsewhere, or say, as individuals often do, 'Somebody ought to do something about this.' The group is the somebody. Its members pick up the butts, clean up the messes, pay for damage they can't repair themselves. They take care of business, not because they enjoy being drudges but because that's what it takes to carry on if you're serious about A.A."

Still, John points out, "nothing in A.A. happens automatically, including the humdrum business of maintaining good relations with the facility where a group meets. At the minimum that means: having a group member act as a liaison with the landlord in the interests of clear communication and harmony; paying the agreed-upon rent on time; leaving the facility in at least as good condition after the meeting as it was in before; and treating other people who use the place with the same courtesy and respect we'd want for ourselves. All in all, not such a tall order!"

In essence, John says, "we have a choice. We can continue as mostly loose and shifting aggregates of uncommitted individuals and watch the destructive force that is alcoholism prevail, even as most of us remain sober. Or we can accept the whole gift of recovery, which is given in its fullness only to those who are willing to work together for the common good.

"Please, before we lose another non-A.A. friend, let us begin to think and talk about these things. Right now."

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## Spiritual Is as Spiritual Does

The Preamble is very clear: "A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution." In fact, writes Frana K., of Glenside, Pennsylvania, "when I came to A.A. 28 years ago, one of the most attractive things about this miraculously disorganized organization was its scrupulous distinction between spirituality and religion. Like many new members, I had a high level of discomfort with religion as I had known it... and very little experience with spirituality."



Today, Frana relates, "I am gratefully aware that everything I have that is good—my sobriety, my life, my sanity, my family and even my concept of a Higher Power—I owe to the spiritual realities I was taught through the program of A.A. At the same time I learned that change can be good—when it means growth. But when it dilutes and skews our Traditions, I believe that taking a group conscience is in order."

Unfortunately, she contends, "with the proliferation of treatment, more and more drunks are being spun off the assembly line into A.A. armed with just enough knowledge to get themselves into trouble. A lot of us oldtimers find the cultish chanting and hand holding—'Keep-coming-back-it-works-if-you-work-it' unnecessary and demeaning. (What's next? song?) And while many of us have happily and politely tolerated the use of a Christian prayer because of its sentimental importance to the history of this remarkable program, I think we must draw the line right there. It is disturbingly contrary to the spirit of our ecumenical Traditions to have a cheerleader (no matter how well-meaning) rally us to prayer with the question, 'Whose Father?' or, worse yet, 'Who keeps us sober?' In spite of good intentions, the effect is offensive.

"Such questions ask for an affirmation of faith that is appropriate only in a church. When the entire group responds to such questions by saying, 'Our Father who art in heaven...', then the members are pledging mutual support to a specific religion. And that is not what A.A. is about. It is about recovery, through spiritual principles that accommodate people of all religions, or no religion, and unify us so that we as group members can help each other stay sober and stick to our primary purpose as stated in Tradition Five: 'carry it's [A.A.'s] message to the alcoholic who still suffers.'"

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## How to Fix Your Meeting so that Everyone 'Hears'

It has been said that when a need is great the solution will appear—but rarely does it happen by itself. Take the case of alcoholics who are hard of hearing or deaf: Their need for interpreted or signed A.A. meetings is urgent; yet there are still few around, despite the fact that turning an ordinary meeting into an interpreted one on a regular basis is easy enough to do with a little work and the steadfast commitment of the group.

"In New York City alone," says Rosemary McG., a longtime member of the Southeast New York (SENY) Special Needs Committee, "it is estimated that there are

about 730,000 people with significant hearing loss—and 70,000 to 80,000 of them have a problem with alcohol. Yet in Manhattan, where an A.A. meeting takes place somewhere almost around the clock, there's an average of just one interpreted meeting a day." As part of its concerted effort to remedy this situation, SENY's Special Needs Committee offers some suggestions for groups interested in starting an interpreted meeting:

*Determine the need:* Is there a need for an interpreted meeting in your area? If so, which day and what type of meeting? If your group meets several times a week, with several types of meetings—open, closed and Step, for example—which seems the best choice for adding an interpreter?

*Do some research:* Contact your area, county or district special needs committee or check your local meeting book and find out about any interpreted meetings that are available in your neighborhood. Attend a couple of these meetings and ask the deaf and hard-of-hearing A.A.s there what their needs are. If there is no call for an interpreted meeting during the times your group meets, consider using the funds you would have used for this purpose toward related Twelfth Step work.

*Make a commitment:* Adding an interpreter to an ongoing meeting is best done when the entire group is willing to make a commitment to this special kind of Twelfth Step work. Is the group willing to pay for an interpreter week in and week out, even if sometimes no deaf or hard-of-hearing people show up? Remember that the meeting will be listed in the meeting book as interpreted, which underscores the group's commitment.

*Create a service position:* Designate a group member to coordinate all the work related to an interpreted meeting. Some advantages: The whole process runs more smoothly, the group takes the effort more seriously, and there is a new opportunity to give service. (You don't need to know sign language to help a deaf or hard-of-hearing alcoholic.)

*Reaching out:* Leaving this out is the most common mistake made by groups that want to attract deaf or hard-of-hearing alcoholics to A.A., and to their meeting in particular. If all you do is hire an interpreter and wait, it's unlikely that many people will just show up at your meeting. There is a sober deaf community in your area—find it! Make up fliers—give them out at other interpreted meetings and send them to local professionals who work with alcoholics who have hearing loss. Notify your local intergroup or central office and all special needs committees *in writing*.

*Be patient:* Sometimes it takes a while for word of a new interpreted meeting to get around. Also, group members may occasionally complain that "not enough" deaf and hard-of-hearing people are showing up for the interpreted meeting. Be aware that not all hearing-impaired people want to identify themselves as such by



sitting in "special" seats reserved for them. They may be sitting elsewhere in the room, especially if they are new or if they arrive late. Thus, it's important for the interpreter to stay and interpret even if you don't see anyone who you think is deaf or hard of hearing.

"In New York City and elsewhere," says Rosemary, there are interpreters who have professional experience with Twelve Step programs. They set their own fees, but most of them are willing to interpret for \$25-\$40 an hour."

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**NOTE:** *Alcoholics Anonymous* (VS-1) \$38.00, and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (VS-3) \$35.00 are available on VHS videos in American Sign Language.

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## P.I.

### Nutmeggers Make A.A. Easy to Find At Hotels and B&Bs

"As the Eleventh Step says, 'Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion,' but how can you be attracted to something you can't see or don't even know about? After all, A.A. is not supposed to be invisible." That, says John K., immediate past chairperson of the District 3 Public Information Committee in northwestern Connecticut, "is the underlying idea for one of our most successful, now ongoing, projects: furnishing hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts in our district with meeting schedules for visitors who might want them."

Last year, John relates, "an A.A. member new to our area stayed in a Torrington hotel. Wanting to find a meeting, he phoned an A.A. helpline, only to be switched to another one in the Midwest. He later told us that while he finally did connect with a meeting that night, he wished it could have been a little easier. About that time, too, our Connecticut past delegate, Tony T., mentioned that during a recent trip in the South he had stayed in a hotel where meeting schedules from a variety of Twelve Step programs were available. We thought it was a great idea and got to work."

Putting their heads together, the P.I. committee drafted a simple letter to be sent, with a meeting list, to the approximately 70 lodging facilities in the district. "Dear Manager," it reads, "We of A.A. want the opportunity to extend the A.A. message of recovery to visitors and tourists. Some hotels and bed-and-breakfasts keep statewide A.A. meeting schedules on hand as a service to their customers who might be looking for a meeting.

Two appropriate areas where schedules can be kept are behind the service desk or on a tourist information bulletin board. If you would like more schedules or information on meetings, please call or write us. We hope you have a good season."

John notes that "this corner of the Nutmeg State is very scenic and popular with tourists, especially in the fall when the foliage turns color. Among all the leaf peepers are more than a few alcoholics, already in A.A. or maybe thinking to try us out. We don't want to toot our horn in a way that smacks of promotion. But having a meeting schedule on hand where the travelers stay is to our minds a way of saying, 'A.A. is here for you if you need us.'"

Meanwhile, the very active P.I. committee continues to place A.A. literature with libraries, high schools, police stations, hospitals and more—all locations where, unlike most of the small hotels and such, racks are essential. To other committees similarly involved in carrying the message but struggling with costs, John has good news: "The racks don't have to cost a lot of money. Here, we found a contact to make up four-folder cardboard literature racks. Because we go in on the orders with the committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community, we can order in bulk and bring the price way down both for us and the C.P.C.s. The cardboard holders work fine, can be transported flat, with no trouble, and of course are obtainable at a fraction of the cost of conventional wire racks."

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### What Do You Say About A.A. at Non-A.A. Meetings?

"There were about 20 of them, students in a psychology class at a local college studying theories of personality change. Young, blank faces staring at me. I introduced myself 'Hello, I'm Sandra, and I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.' I searched their eyes for recognition, empathy, warmth, understanding. There was none, and I struggled to continue. 'I appreciate this opportunity to tell you about our program of recovery from the once hopeless disease of alcoholism. I'll tell you about my personal experience, then play a video, called *Hope*, for you, produced by our General Service Office in New York City.' I was grasping."

Like more and more A.A.s everywhere, Sandra D., of the Center Group in Tucson, Arizona, was fulfilling a request to carry the A.A. message at a meeting outside the Fellowship. Writing in the September 1996 issue of *Just for Today*, the newsletter of the Tucson Area

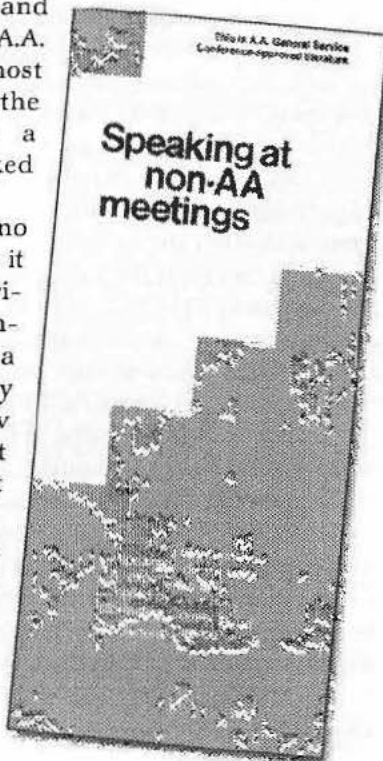


Intergroup, she acknowledges that “talking to nonalcoholics can be very difficult. I am comfortable telling my story at an A.A. meeting, where I get smiles of identification, some laughs and certainly understanding. But talking to these college students for instance, was like talking to my parents when I told them I was going to A.A. Not a flicker of comprehension.”

What Sandra did, she writes, “was talk about the disease: how history shows when man coped with alcoholism through insane asylums, jails, social isolation, alienation from all we know and love, shame and degradation, often to die an ugly death—until Alcoholics Anonymous. I told them about Dr. Bob and Bill W. in 1935, stumbling on the means of recovery—one alcoholic talking to another and not picking up a drink one day at a time through help from a Higher Power. I told them about the first few ‘recovered’ people who wrote their experiences of staying sober and how these formed the Twelve Steps as a program to achieve a ‘spiritual experience.’ And I told them about my own insanity when I didn’t want the drink but couldn’t stay away from it.

“Then I talked about coming to A.A. How the people convinced me that they once drank like I did but were now staying sober; they helped me and asked nothing in return. How I kept coming back and learned to trust and be honest and finally became whole again. I explained to these college students how A.A. is an all volunteer organization. How we keep things going by showing up and doing what needs to be done. I told them about anonymity, sponsorship, meetings, groups, intergroups; area, national and world A.A. After playing the video *Hope*, I opened the floor for questions. Silence. I thanked them and reminded them that A.A. can be found in almost every country in the world. Afterward a young woman asked about ALAnon.”

No bells rang, no mountains moved, yet it “was a great experience,” Sandra concludes. “It gave me a fresh outlook on my sobriety and how important it is that people know about this answer to hopelessness. I would like to preach to the rooftops about the miracle of A.A. But our Traditions temper us. We share only when we are asked.”



The pamphlet “Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings,” available from G.S.O., provides clear guidelines for those of our members who volunteer to tell their personal recovery stories at events outside the Fellowship. Included are a suggested outline for a talk as well as the 20 questions most frequently asked at non-A.A. meetings, with suggested answers.

## Correctional Facilities

### Florida A.A.s Pay Attention to a Communications Gap

“Last March, Florida A.A.s received a startling wake-up call, one that we’re paying close attention to,” says Lynn W., immediate past chairperson of the large Institutions Committee that embraces South Florida plus the Virgin Islands and the Bahamas. “It came,” she says, “in a workshop held by the Department of Corrections on the new four-hour-long ‘Citizen Volunteer Training Workshop’ that regular volunteers are now required to attend if they plan on taking more than six meetings a year into a state facility.”

Among the speakers was a security officer from the Department of Corrections, who spoke on security issues surrounding the bringing of meetings into prisons and jails. Comments Carol P., a member of the Institutions Committee who also was there, “He appeared to be extremely well-informed, as he had been with security in the D.O.C. for 23 years. So you can imagine how surprised we were when he shared that until that day, he’d had no idea of what A.A. was about. He further said that most of the officers think all of us A.A.s are just like the inmates and cannot understand ‘why you would want to go inside to bring them a meeting.’”

“His remarks,” Lynn adds, “gave most of us there a new perspective. If this man, after 23 years’ experience of seeing us come in behind the walls, had no idea of what we do, what about the other correction officers? The fact is that they generally consider us a pain in the neck: We break into their routines when we come because we have to be scrutinized, escorted and accompanied by authorized personnel every minute of our stay. And all the time most of them haven’t the foggiest idea of what we do or even what the Fellowship is about. A lot of them recognize the letters A.A., but unless they mistake it for American Airlines or even AAA Automobile Association, that’s about it.”



Both Lynn and Carol suggest that A.A. volunteers would do well to carry copies of the pamphlet "If You Are a Professional" with them each time they enter a facility and hand one to every officer they meet. Says Lynn: "We are always guests of the facility, and being there is a privilege that they extend to us. We should never ever talk at, or down, to an officer, and we should know the regulations that affect us forward and backward. There are sound reasons for most of the rules in effect today. Regrettably, a number of them are the direct consequences of rule breaking in the past by volunteers who didn't bother to find out, or else ignored, say, a simple rule against bringing in a pen or maybe utensils with sharp edges."

Here Lynn inserts a caveat: "The minute we break a rule, however dumb it may seem to us, the results trickle down. We cause trouble for some poor alcoholic inmate who needs our help, and we ruin it for A.A., maybe for years to come. Understanding the very real security problems faced by the officers and their supervisors can help us to communicate with them clearly about our program of recovery and to cooperate fully. And hopefully, in a ripple effect, to help the alcoholic inside. But, as someone once said to me, 'Don't get involved in corrections work to be a do-gooder.—there are other places for you. Get involved because you want to carry the A.A. message inside and think you have the experience, strength and hope to do it.'"

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## Treatment Facilities

### 'Bridging the Gap' Has Come of Age, Workshop Shows

When the Sixth Annual Bridging the Gap Workshop Weekend convened in St. Louis, Missouri, last September, there were 83 attendees from 15 states with active BTG programs: Alabama, Arizona, California, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Eastern and Western Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, South Carolina, Texas, and Northern and Southern Wisconsin. And that's just the tip of the "Bridge" effort: There presently are programs in about 30 states and provinces, many of them working closely with each other, and more are springing up all the time.

"Presenters shared their experiences in developing and implementing Bridging the Gap/Temporary Contact programs," reports Martha L., of Minneapolis, Minnesota, an appointed member of the trustees' Treatment Facilities Committee, who was there. She explains that "the BTG concept involves reaching out to people leaving a corrections or treatment facility, while a temporary contact program usually consists of a standing committee that works in cooperation with the T.F. and C.F. committees. Those who want a contact are provided with postcards or forms to fill out; these are then mailed to a P.O. box or intergroup office, where they are matched by the committee with an A.A. member who has agreed to serve as a temporary contact. Most programs offer guidelines and suggestions for the A.A. volunteer, utilizing the pamphlet 'Bridging the Gap' and other literature available from the General Service Office in New York City. A number of areas also have printed up clear and helpful flyers and pamphlets of their own."

At the Workshop Weekend, Martha notes, "there was much diversity in the methods used to implement temporary contact programs. The attendees were able to share their frustrations and solutions during the question and answer period following each presentation. Several people were there to learn how to start a program; they left with ideas and material generously shared by members of seasoned committees. As one A.A. pointed out. "Planning BTG strategy and making certain that there are no slip ups is exacting and time consuming. But each time we know that making a successful connection can literally save the life of an alcoholic, so we try to leave nothing to chance."

Topics at the Workshop Weekend, which was hosted by the Eastern Missouri Bridging the Gap Subcommittee, covered a variety of concerns, such as the updating of contact lists; rural, metropolitan and statewide contact programs; the history of BTG; and much more. Of special interest to many, Martha says, "was a glass-enclosed Eastern Missouri archives display."

Also at hand was the BTG resources library; in its files are more than 100 BTG and related items from districts, areas and G.S.O. An extensive storehouse, it includes pamphlets, manuals, history, letters, BTG newsletters, a file of G.S.O.'s *Treatment Facilities Newsletter* as well as one of *Box 4-5-9* issues and articles, skit manuscripts and International Convention BTG audio tapes and tapes of past BTG annual workshops.

Similarly, Martha adds, a five-page detailed report of the Weekend Workshop, a library index, order forms and a contact list of 39 areas in 29 states (and provinces) can be obtained from: BTG Coordinator, 3843 Berview Lane, #D, St. Louis, Missouri 63125; or call 314-894-9427.

The next BTG Workshop Weekend will be held Sept. 19-21, 1997, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.—Via G.S.O.

FEBRUARY-MARCH 1997

## Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

### February

- 1-2—*Baton Rouge, Louisiana.* Red Stick Roundup. Write: Ch., Service Office, 2351 Energy Drive, Suite 2011, Baton Rouge, LA 70808
- 7-9—*Brawley, California.* Imperial Valley Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 393, El Centro, CA 92244-393
- 7-9—*Burbank, California.* 22nd Annual San Fernando Valley Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7727, Northridge, CA 91327-7727
- 7-9—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.* Tenth Annual Mid-Winter Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 742, Station A, Fredericton NB E3B 5B4
- 7-9—*North Island, New Zealand.* National Conv. Write: Registrar, Box 49, Whakatu, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand 068700809
- 13-16—*Chicago, Illinois.* 33rd Annual International Women's Conf. Write: IAAWC, Box 815, Cary, IL 60013-0815
- 13-16—*Virginia Beach, Virginia.* 21st Ocean Front Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2801, Virginia Beach, VA 23450-2801
- 14-16—*North Little Rock, Arkansas.* 15th Annual Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72211
- 14-16—*Louisville, Kentucky.* 46th State Conf. Write: Host Comm., Box 37137, Louisville, KY 40233-7137
- 14-16—*Liverpool, New York.* Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 3588, Syracuse, NY 13220-3588
- 14-16—*El Paso, Texas.* 35th Annual Jamboree. Write: Sec'y, Box 3115, El Paso, TX 79923
- 14-16—*Huntsville, Texas.* Ninth Spirit of Recovery Conf. Write: Spirit of Recovery, 320 Market #5, Galveston, TX 77550
- 14-16—*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.* 25th Anniversary North Shore Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 91086, West Vancouver BC V7V 3N3
- 21-23—*Kansas City, Kansas.* 15th Annual Sunflower Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 26322, Overland Park, KS 66225
- 21-23—*Tacoma/Fife, Washington.* Puget Sound Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 111948, Tacoma, WA 98411-1948.
- 21-23—*Hato Rey, Puerto Rico.* Puerto Rico Conv. Write: Ch., Apartado 35, Caguas, PR 00726

- 21-23—*Calgary, Alberta, Canada.* Western Canada Region Service Assembly. Write: Ch., 60 Millrise Drive S.W., Calgary, AB T2Y 2C6
- 21-23—*Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.* Saskatoon Round-Up. Write: Round-Up Comm., 311-220 3rd Ave. South, Saskatoon, SK S7K 1M1
- 21-23—*Pattaya, Thailand.* Second Thailand Roundup. Write: Ch., P.O. Box 1032, New Petchburi Road Post Office, Bangkok 10311, Thailand
- 28-March 2—*Costa Mesa, California.* 12th Annual Orange County Conv. Write: Ch., 16001 Aria Circle, Huntington Beach, CA 92649
- 28-March 2—*Aberdeen, South Dakota.* West Central Regional Service Conf. Write: Ch., 614 S. Broadway, Watertown, SD 57201

### March

- 7-9—*San Diego, California.* 30th Annual PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 720787, San Diego, CA 92172
- 7-9—*Indianapolis, Indiana.* 44th Annual State Conv. Write: Ch., 18272 Migro Lane, Goshen, IN 46526
- 7-9—*Romulus, Michigan.* March Roundup. Write: Roundup Sec'y, 21606 Arrowhead, St. Clair Shores, MI 48082
- 7-9—*Sioux Falls, South Dakota.* Eighth Sioux Empire Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 566, Sioux Falls, SD 57101
- 7-9—*Montreal, Quebec, Canada.* The Ninth Bilingual Conf. of Young People in Montreal. Write: Ch., Box 49061, 7275 Sherbrooke Street East, Montreal, PQ H1N 3T6
- 13-15—*Spokane, Washington.* Third Annual Northwest Pockets of Enthusiasm. Write: Ch., Box 617, Airway Heights, WA 99001
- 14-16—*Fresno, California.* NCCAA Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1484, Rohmert Park, CA 94927-1484

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

February (page 53): Step Two.  
March (page 35): Corporate Poverty.

- 14-16—*Victorville, California.* 13th Annual Sunshine of the Spirit Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1894, Apple Valley, CA 92307
- 14-16—*Gallatin, Tennessee.* Area 64 CFC Workshop. Write: Ch., 241 Eastland Ave., Ripley, TN 38063
- 14-16—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada.* Ontario Regional Conf. Write: Toronto Intergroup, Suite 202, 234 Eglinton Avenue East, Toronto, ON M4P 1K5
- 20-23—*Columbia, South Carolina.* 50th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 5821, Columbia, SC 29250
- 21-23—*Springfield, Illinois.* Southern Illinois Area Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 9186, Springfield, IL 62791-9186
- 21-23—*Lincolnshire, Illinois.* N.I.A. 25th Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1141, Waukegan, IL 60079-1141
- 21-23—*Ruston, Louisiana.* Sixth Annual Upstate Conv. Write: Ch., Box 651, Ruston, LA 71273-0651
- 21-23—*Cherry Hill, New Jersey.* Area 45 General Service Conv. Write: Ch., Box 822, Marlton, NJ 08053
- 21-23—*Syracuse, New York.* GLRCYPAA VII. Write: Ch., Box 2356, N. Syracuse, NY 13220
- 21-23—*Cincinnati, Ohio.* 14th Annual Area 56 Mim-Conf. Write: Ch., Box 40324, Cincinnati, OH 45240-0324
- 21-23—*Butler, Pennsylvania.* Area 60 Sixth Annual Getaway Weekend. Write: Ch., 210 Mansfield Rd., Washington, PA 15301

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on April, May or June events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by February 10, the calendar deadline for the April, May issue of Box 4-5-9.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event, from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, 19 \_\_\_\_\_

Name of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Place (city, state or prov.): \_\_\_\_\_

For information, write: (exact mailing address) \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone # (for office use only): \_\_\_\_\_

Flip up this end of page - for events on reverse side





- 21-23—*Newport, Rhode Island*. 21st Area Conv. Write: Ch., Box 14574, East Providence, RI 02914
- 21-23—*Rapid City, South Dakota*. 13th Annual Rushmore Round-up Conf. Write: Ch., Box 594, Rapid City, SD 57709-0594
- 27-30—*San Diego, California*. 20th Annual San Diego Spring Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 500205, San Diego, CA 92150-0205
- 27-31—*Adelaide, South Australia*. 32nd National Conv. Write: Sec'y, Box 10302, Gouger Street, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia
- 28-29—*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*. 50th Anniversary Conv. Write: Ch., Avenida N.S. de Copacabana, 1137/801 - CEP 22070-010, Rio de Janeiro, RJ Brazil

## April

- 4-6—*Redding, California*. Hospital & Institution Conf. Write: Box 852, Red Bluff, CA 96080
- 4-6—*Fort Wayne, Indiana*. 17th Northeast Indiana Conv. & 54th Banquet. Write: Ch., Box 15874, Fort Wayne, IN 46885
- 4-6—*Wichita, Kansas*. 22nd Annual Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1814, Wichita, KS 67202
- 4-6—*Tarrytown, New York*. 33rd Annual SENY Conv. Write: Box 1688, Madison Square Sta., New York, NY 10159
- 4-6—*Akron, Ohio*. 22nd Mini-Conference. Write: Ch., 3378 Washington Blvd., Cleveland Heights, OH 44118
- 4-6—*Longview, Texas*. 28th Annual East

- Texas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2082, Longview, TX 75606
- 4-6—*Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*. Southern Alberta Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 212, Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y5
- 11-13—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii*. Ninth Annual Big Island Bash. Write: Ch., Box 390727, Kailua-Kona, HI 96739
- 11-13—*Grand Forks, North Dakota*. Northern Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 14121, Grand Forks, ND 58201-4121
- 18-20—*Sacramento, California*. 17th Northern California Woman-to-Woman Conf. Write: Ch., 5752 Muldrow Rd., Sacramento, CA 95841
- 18-20—*Superior, Wisconsin*. 52nd Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 996, Superior, WI 54880
- 25-27—*Chipley, Florida*. Country Roundup. Write: Ch., 2374 Suggs Rd., Chipley, FL 32428
- 25-27—*St. Joseph, Missouri*. St. Joseph 54th Anniv. Write: Ch., 3106 County Line Rd., St. Joseph, MO 64506
- 25-27—*Brattleboro, Vermont*. Vermont Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1997, Wallingford, VT 05773

## May

- 2-4—*Long Beach, California*. 16th Annual Southern California H & I Conf. Write: Ch., Box 807, Parkersfield, CA 93302-0807

- 2-4—*Laughlin, Nevada*. 13th Annual Tri-State Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 35378, Las Vegas, NV 89133
- 2-4—*Oliver, British Columbia, Canada*. 13th Annual South Okanagan Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 392, Oliver, BC V0H 1T0
- 2-4—*Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada*. Area 85 Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 73, Thunder Bay, ON P7C 4V5
- 9-10—*Mosney, County Meath, Ireland*. 40th All-Ireland Conv. Write: G.S.O., 109 South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland
- 16-17—*San Jose, California*. Sober & Free 1997 (hosted by gay & lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 4707, San Jose, CA 95150-4707
- 16-18—*Boise, Idaho*. Area Spring Assembly & Conv. Write: Area Spring Assembly, Box 7904, Boise, ID 83707-1904
- 22-25—*Daytona Beach, Florida*. Seventh Annual Daytona Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4911, South Daytona, FL 32121
- 22-25—*Waycross, Georgia*. Okefenokee Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 403, Waycross, GA 31502
- 22-25—*San Jose, Costa Rica, Central America*. Gringo-Tico International Conv. Write: Ch., Gringo-Tico, SJO 1348, Box 025216, Miami, FL 33102-5216
- 23-25—*Pickney, Michigan*. Agape Weekend. Write: Ch., 4745 Chovin, Dearborn, MI 48126